

in this issue . . .

EDITORIAL: REAL CHANGE AT LAST?	2
FREEHOLD IN THE HOMELANDS: WHAT ARE THE REAL CONSTRAINTS? by C.R. Cross	3
CONTINUING UNREST: A SMALL TOWN PERSPECTIVE by M. Whisson	9
FROM CROSSROADS TO KHAYELITSHA TO . . . ? by Dot Cleminshaw	11
THE TRANSKEI BANTUSTAN AND ITS UNIVERSITY: A CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY by Clive Napier	15
CLASS AND CAPITAL IN AFRICA: REVIEW OF BILL FREUND'S THE MAKING OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICA by Christopher Saunders	19

Cover Photograph: Vaal Triangle Scene, 1984. See Leader and Article on page 9.

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EDITORIAL

REAL CHANGE AT LAST?

Three statements from the Government in the first week of the new parliamentary session offer the hope that the Nationalists may at last be turning away from their past and looking for a new direction which could inspire a new atmosphere of mutual co-operation here.

First, there was the announcement, in Mr P.W. Botha's "package deal" for blacks, that freehold rights would be available to them in white South Africa in future.

Second was the offer to release Nelson Mandela and other political leaders and talk to them, provided they renounced the use of violence. Third was the announcement of the suspension of all resettlement plans for black communities which did not want to move from their present homes, while a policy review took place.

Although Mr. Botha's "package" was rejected by the entire range of black leadership, the conceding of freehold rights, on however limited an initial basis, represents a complete about-face on an absolutely basic tenet of Verwoerdian apartheid which must have that formidable figure twirling in his grave.

The Mandela statement also represents a complete break with the past government attitude towards people who have always been represented by it either as agents of Moscow

or as common criminals, not fit for decent people to be seen talking to. It is a brave step that Mr. Botha has taken and, whatever verbal skirmishing may obscure the initial response to it, we hope that response will be positive.

The suspension of the resettlement programme will, we hope, soon be followed by its being publicly abandoned altogether. That would mark the end of one of the ugliest and cruellest features of Nationalist policy. We hope too that in the policy review which is taking place, threatened communities will be fully consulted, and that the technical and financial assistance which has never been given to them in the past, will be made available to rehabilitate and develop the places where they live. Instead of being in constant conflict with their white neighbours, these communities might then be able to build up a healthy relationship with them which would be an example of harmony and co-operation to all those, black, white and brown, who now find themselves facing each other across totally artificial boundaries created by the past madnesses of apartheid.

Provided these three new initiatives do not turn out to be hedged about by all sorts of hidden conditions on the Government side, they could point the way to a new era of really constructive engagement between it and its opponents which could give new hope to all of us. □